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*Hon. John Adams
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The Author.*

*The right of private judgment in religion, vindicated against
the claims of the Romish Church and all
kindred usurpations,*

IN A

DUDLEIAN LECTURE,

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY IN CAMBRIDGE,

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DUDLEIAN LECTURE.

2 CORINTHIANS i. 24.

NOT FOR THAT WE HAVE DOMINION OVER YOUR FAITH.

OF the four subjects to be alternately treated on occasions, like the present, the third, which comes in course to be considered, respects the erroneous, dangerous, and aspiring pretensions of the Romish Church. These have been exhibited in various points of view by the sixteen Lecturers,* who have already discussed this quadrennial topic.

* The following have been the topics on the errors of Popery.

1757. Prof. Edward Wigglesworth, D. D. Cambridge. On infallibility. 1 John iv. 1.
1761. Thomas Foxcroft, A. M. Boston. On the Pope's supremacy. Mark x. 43.
1765. Jonathan Mayhew, D. D. Boston. On Popish idolatry. 2 Cor. vi. 16.
1769. Samuel Mather, D. D. Boston. Popery a complex falsehood. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.
1773. Samuel Cooper, D. D. Boston. On the man of sin. 2 Thess. ii. 1—10.
1777. Prof. Edward Wigglesworth, D. D. Cambridge. On tradition. Mat. xv. 6.
1781. William Gordon, D. D. Roxbury. On transubstantiation. Mat. xxvi. 26.
1785. Pres. Joseph Willard, D. D. LL. D. Cambridge. On persecution. Luke ix. 56.
1789. Jason Haven, A. M. Dedham. On supererogation. Mat. xxv. 8, 9.
1793. John Lathrop, D. D. Boston. On tyranny and usurpations. 1 Peter v. 3.
1797. Josiah Bridge, A. M. Sudbury. On the sufficiency of the scriptures. 2 Tim. iii. 17.
1801. Charles Stearns, D. D. Lincoln. On ancient and modern idolatry. Rev. xiii. 14.
1805. Thomas Thacher, A. M. Dedham. On miracles. Mark xiii. 22.
1809. John Allyn, D. D. Duxbury. On supremacy and infallibility. Mat. xxiii. 8, 9.
1813. Pres. John T. Kirkland, D. D. LL. D. Cambridge. On the principles of the Reformation. Rom. xiv. 22.
1817. Nathaniel Thayer, D. D. Lancaster. On the power of prejudice. Mat. xiii. 15.

The claims of this proud hierarchy, as they have in a great measure ceased to terrify, have accordingly lost much of their former interest. Blessed be God, the alarms, which agitated the breasts of our venerable and scrupulous ancestors, and which had not subsided, at the establishment of this Lecture, are now known only in history. The thunders of the Vatican have long since spent their rage; and, even in its neighbouring atmosphere, they are regarded, as artificial and harmless attempts to imitate the war of the elements. The Inquisition, that reproach upon human nature, which, for several centuries, held “in durancê vile” the bodies and souls of its subjects, and exerted without restraint its despotick power over their reputation, their property, and their lives, is at length suppressed, and leaves its recent supporters to wonder, how such an engine of tyranny could have been so long maintained.

There are however grievous abuses, that are not confined to the Church, which has most effectually cherished their growth; abuses, whose deleterious influence is manifest in almost every part of Christendom; abuses, which, as they are founded in human nature, need our caution under every denomination, and in every age. Of this number is the disposition so common among men unwarrantably to infringe the right of private judgment in religion.

This temper our Saviour found it necessary to counteract in his earliest and most highly favoured followers. For, on a certain time, his apostles were disputing among themselves, “who should be the greatest.” “The disciple whom Jesus loved,” speaking in the name of his brethren, complained to his Lord, “Master, we saw one casting out demons in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not us.” This was the temper, which the apostle Paul abjured, in the theme of my discourse, when, in his letter to the Corinthians, he abso-

lutely disclaimed dominion over their faith. It is indeed a disposition chargeable on all, whatever may be their sect, or pretensions in religion, who presume to abridge the liberty, which our blessed Lord recognises, when he inquires, "Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?"

The Church of Rome avows its title to this power. In examining and resisting its usurpation of the rights of conscience, we may, at the same time, find arguments to repel the claims of all, who act, as if invested with this high commission.

That we may determine, what authority the Romish Church explicitly asserts on this subject, it is but fair to appeal to its acknowledged standards.

In an authentick record of the Council of Trent, to which Roman Catholicks generally appeal, as infallible in its decisions, we find, among numerous passages to the same effect, the following prohibition.* "The holy synod decrees, that no one, relying on his own prudence, in matters of faith, and of manners pertaining to the construction of christian doctrine, wresting sacred scripture to his own sense, dare to interpret it contrary to the sense, which the holy mother church has holden, and continues to hold. Whoever shall contravene this decree, let him be noted by the ordinaries, and suffer the punishment in such cases provided."

At the same session the council speaks of "the catholic faith, without which it is impossible to please God;" and "out of which none can be saved."

In the fifth session,† "Lest, under the form of godliness, impiety should be disseminated, the same holy synod ordains, that none be admitted to the publick, or even private reading of the scripture, unless he shall have been examined and approved by the bishop of the diocese."

* His. Con. Trid. Sessio iv. p. 20.

† His. Con. Trid. p. 27.

These extracts are abundantly sufficient to show, what entire renunciation of private judgment in religion the Catholick Church exacts from all within her pale, and how completely she excludes all others from the possibility of pleasing their Maker, and from the hope of salvation.

In opposition to every such lofty and exclusive claim, we maintain, in concurrence with numberless plain passages of scripture, which convey to us the same meaning with those, already cited, that the right of private judgment in religion is apparent

I. From the reason and fitness of things.

Why is man, in point of intellect, so highly distinguished above the brutal species, if, like them, he must be subject, in all respects, to the control of earthly masters? Why is he endued with reason, the candle of the Lord in the human breast, if rules for its exercise, in the concerns of salvation, are to be prescribed by those, who equally derive it from the same omniscient source? Why is the faculty of conscience bestowed upon him, if, without the liberty of obeying its enlightened monitions, they are to be counteracted or stifled by fellow mortals? Why is he made capable of discerning the difference between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, virtue and vice, holiness and sin, and of choosing the good and refusing the evil, if this discrimination may be confounded, and this election suspended, or nullified, or reversed by a merely human tribunal?

These queries are by no means intended to imply such a right of private judgment, as is, by a fair construction, incompatible with the rights of others. For the principle, which entitles me to judge for myself in concerns, which lie between God and my own conscience, requires me to respect the same privilege in others.

Much less does the sentiment, I am defending, allow me to abjure religion, if I can persuade myself, that it has

no binding force. For as from our social relations we justly infer our social duties, much more incontrovertibly are our obligations to piety derived from our necessary connexion with our infinitely wise, and powerful, and benevolent Creator, and righteous moral Governour.

Now what is religion, but "virtue, as founded on reverence of God, and expectation of future rewards and punishments?" Thus explained it is in itself a subject of voluntary choice. This is essential to its very existence. Human authority is as unable to produce it, as human penetration is incompetent to discern in others the operations of the freeborn mind. They, who usurp dominion over our faith, if they possess the power, may prescribe our creed; they may lay before us motives to adopt the popular theology; they may at least prevent us from uttering opinions contrary to the system established by law. They may cite us, if refractory, before their tribunals; they may punish us, as in former times, with fines, confiscations, bodily tortures, imprisonment, or death; or, according to the more modern system of persecution, they may rob us of our good name; they may denounce us, as hereticks; because we cannot see with their eyes, nor conscientiously subscribe to their formularies of human invention; they may reject us from their communion, place us out of the sphere of their charity, withhold from us their good offices, and inflame the minds of the ignorant and unreflecting against us, as unsound professors of faith in Christ, and dangerous members of society. But such measures can have no tendency to convict us of error, to refute our conclusions, nor to guide our inquiries.

Religion therefore to be something more, than an empty name, must be a matter of voluntary choice. Still however we are accountable for the religion we choose. None, but the omniscient Jehovah, can decide, whether it be such, as will stand the test of his final tribunal. Let

us not then rashly assume his prerogative ourselves, nor submit to its usurpation in others.

For suppose the faith established by human authority to be substantially correct. It can be no religion to them, who no otherwise than implicitly embrace it. For to answer this description, it must be founded on the rational conviction of the understanding; it must result from the affections of the heart. How far human authority alone is from producing these requisites, let common sense decide.

II. But the right of private judgment in religion will be rendered the more unquestionable by considering some of the consequences, which follow from implicit reliance on human authority.

One of these is, that it is unfavourable to the investigation of truth. By requiring us to take religion upon trust, it not only extinguishes the motives, but absolutely denies the right of coming to any other conclusion, than such, as is authoritatively imposed. But in what condition is any person impartially to examine a subject, or come to a rational decision, if predetermined, what to believe, and what to reject? Yet to produce this unwavering reliance on their dogmas is the constant aim of the Romish Church. Hence their extreme reluctance, that any should read the holy scriptures, but those, in whose concurrent opinions they can confide. We have already remarked, under what rigid restrictions, the Council of Trent allows the Bible to the common people. In their twenty fifth session,* they forbid, under severe penalties, "the publication of any commentaries, glosses, annotations, inferences, and even any kind of interpretation of the decrees of said Council."

It is moreover confidently asserted by credible travellers, who have visited catholick countries, that the unwillingness of their spiritual guides to disseminate the

* His. Con. Trid. p. 287 et seq.

scriptures is confirmed by the circumstance, that they are rarely offered for sale, even in their populous cities.

There can be no wonder, when we consider, that the same authority in settling points of religious faith and practice is assumed for the alleged traditions of the church, and for the authoritative decisions of their councils, as for the scriptures themselves. How feeble then must be the inducements to search the sacred records, when they are considered a dead letter without the aid of such pretended infallible interpreters?

That I have not mistaken the decisions of the Council of Trent appears from the circumstance, that they are interpreted in the same manner by the most celebrated modern defenders of its dogmas.

Says Bishop Milner in his "End of religious controversy,"* "It is sufficient for the laity to hear the word of God from those, whom God has appointed to announce and explain it to them, whether by sermons, or catechisms, or other good books, or in the tribunal of penance." Challoner, in his "papist misrepresented and represented,"† remarks,‡ "It is not convenient for the scripture to be read indifferently by all men; but only by such, as are humble, discreet, and devout, and such as are willing to use directions in perusing this sacred volume." A similar sentiment is expressed by Fletcher, in his "Reflections on the spirit of religious controversy."‡ "Whoever will calculate all the errors, superstitions, impieties, and abuses, which ignorance and fanaticism have derived from the holy scriptures, will probably be induced to allow, that it would have been better for reason, religion, and government, if they had been totally withheld from the people, or at least if they had remained, as Dryden observes, in the honest Latin of St. Jerome, than have been put indriscriminately in the hands of all."

* p. 383.

† p. 26.

‡ p. 155.

“In the Council of Trent the Bishop of St. Mark said,* “The Canons determine, that the laicks ought humbly to receive the doctrine of faith, which is given them by the church, without disputing or thinking farther on it.”

One cannot but observe, how different is the language of rational and consistent Protestants. As they maintain, that the scriptures alone contain the words of everlasting life, and are the only perfect rule of faith and practice, they exhort all to peruse them with fidelity, not doubting, but with the honest use of their faculties, and the means of information within their reach, they will be guided into all necessary truth. They ask not for entire uniformity of faith; for they believe it impracticable in the present state of imperfect views. The free adoption and expression of conflicting opinions they consider to be not only innocent, but indispensable to the evicition of truth. Hence that different readers of scripture should affix different meanings to many of their contents, they consider no better an argument against the expediency of allowing men to understand them for themselves, than abuses of reason prove, that men must not be allowed to use their reason in the common affairs of life.

Implicit dependence on human authority is very apt to make men place the essence of religion in something, which deserves not the distinction.

Hence what deference is paid by the catholicks, as a sect, to the authority of the church; and how disproportionate the merit, which is annexed to such submission! How prone are they to transfer to saints and images the homage, which is due to Jehovah alone! What undue stress is laid on confession, absolution, and indeed on their external ceremonies in general, to the comparative neglect of those properties of the christian character,

* Father Paul's His. p. 141.

which it should be the leading purpose of the rituals of religion to produce!

To employ force in religion has also a direct tendency to render men hypocrites. People of the most diverse opinions are obliged to conceal them, and pretend a conformity, which they do not really entertain. When likewise the adoption of the popular faith is indispensable to the attainment of worldly honours and emoluments, what irresistible inducements are placed before unprincipled candidates for promotion to feign adherence to the established church?

Unlimited confidence in human decisions farther subjects men to receive without examination and without gainsaying the most grievous impositions upon the understanding.

What, for example, can be more incredible, than the doctrine of infallibility maintained by the Romish church! They are not agreed, where it resides; but that it is the property of their church, they have not the smallest doubt. Many of them allow, that every individual, even the Pope, taken by himself, is fallible; but then the decisions of their general councils are infallible. This is as evident an absurdity in religion, as it would be in arithmetical calculations, to assert, that, though every single cypher is of no amount; yet a certain combination of cyphers would produce a sum of unspeakable value.

In support of infallibility, Bellarmine* expresses this revolting sentiment. "The Catholick faith teaches, that every virtue is good, and every vice evil. But, if the Pope should err by enjoining vices, or by prohibiting virtues, the church would be bound to believe, that vices are good, and virtues bad, unless it would sin against conscience."

But the greatest stretch of credulity is required in the

* de Rom. Pontif. Lib. iv. cap. v. § ult.

following article of the Catholick faith.* “I profess, that in the mass is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead ; and that in the most holy sacrament of the eucharist there is truly, really, and substantially the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ ; that there is the conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood, which conversion the Catholick church calls *transubstantiation*.”

A modern writer† makes the following strange defence of this incredible doctrine. “The unerring authority of the church has declared transubstantiation true. It is then the part of an infidel, rather than a christian to ask, how can this be?”

It is impossible for language to convey to our minds more glaring absurdities, than are contained both in this doctrine and this defence.

Consider, for a moment, what must have been the result of implicit faith and denial of the right of private judgment, if applied to the arts and sciences. Assume, for example, the period, when the church of Rome had risen to the zenith of her power, and held the civilized world under her imperious control ; and suppose, she had then, in the common affairs of life, as in religion, precisely defined, what must be believed and practised by all succeeding generations. It is demonstrable, that the sciences would have continued in the same degraded condition, to which they were reduced, during the dark ages. The arts would also have remained in the same rude state. The invention of printing would have been stifled in its infancy, as the effect of magick. The mariner’s compass would have been unknown. Most of those improvements, which now adorn the face of society, and contribute most effectually to the comfort and convenience of

* Bulla Papæ Pii iv. p. 324.

† Cath. Chris. p. 32.

life would have been prevented. The land, in which we live, would have been, through every successive age, the exclusive abode of savages ; and, instead of this growing community of enlightened freemen, the arts of civilized life, which are advancing with such rapid strides, our temples of religion, and our seats of literature and science, the tenants of the wilderness might still have been practising, even on this consecrated spot, their barbarous rites.

But thanks to divine providence, that while, in respect of religion, the minds of men were kept in a state of debasing subjection, they were suffered, on all other subjects, to expand. By the invention of printing, and other kindred arts, knowledge became gradually diffused, the arbitrary demands of the Romish Church began to be detected, till some daring spirits were at length found, who ventured to “stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ had made them free.”

In the origin of the Reformation, with its causes and effects, we behold the wonderful efficiency of that sovereign Being, who delights to bring good out of evil, and order from confusion. To human view the sale of indulgences, to gratify the ambition and avarice of an assuming pontiff, appears an abuse, fraught with evil alone. But it was providentially overruled to lay a restraint on the power, which inconsiderately ordained it. How exactly fitted to the purpose was the principal instrument of the Reformation ! No doubt, he possessed a bold, intractable, and aspiring temper. But grant the worst, which his enemies allege. Such a spirit was, humanly speaking, necessary to encounter dangers, and surmount difficulties appalling to every fainter heart. Had he possessed more of the mild and conciliatory temper of the gospel, he would not have been adapted to the wonderful enterprise, in which he so heroically engaged. Far was he from suspecting, for a length of time, to what his

resolute measures tended. He thought only of restraining the excesses, which threatened the church with dissolution. When first urging the correction of abuses, he was as far from anticipating the Reformation, which he at length successfully accomplished, as were the early patriots of the American revolution from hoping for our national independence, when first they resisted the encroachments of arbitrary power. In both cases we are equally astonished at the inscrutable agency of the Most High.

One of the most obvious reflections on the history of this great event is the exceedingly gradual progress of improvement. For no sooner had Luther opened the door of Reformation, so as to encourage others to enter, than he closed it upon all, who attempted to advance, what he had begun. His first adherents must have found, that they had only exchanged masters; that, while they had abjured the Pope and indulgences, they had enlisted under a despot, who was equally determined to resist all encroachments on the faith, he had prescribed. How disgraceful were the quarrels, into which he soon entered with those, whom he employed, as auxiliaries in opposing a common enemy; but whom he made to feel the strong arm of his power, the bitter venom of his tongue, and the cruel aspersions of his pen, as soon as they dared, like him, to exercise the right of private judgment!

Soon after the Reformation commenced in Germany, it was, by a singular concurrence of circumstances, introduced into England. By the good sense of the nation it here made some advances; but the same papal spirit appeared in their king, as in the German reformer; and though, in subsequent generations, we acknowledge, with gratitude to Providence, successive improvements; yet it would be presumption in us to suppose, the time has yet arrived, when, as nothing needs amendment, farther reformation is hopeless.

We have evidently much to learn both as to asserting and respecting the right of private judgment.

Our venerable forefathers, whose good properties we desire to acknowledge, respect, and imitate, while we would avoid their imperfections, justly thought it an unreasonable hardship, that they should be obliged to submit to the usurpations of their mother church ; but their sensibility was most excited at the imposition of ceremonies, which we now generally agree to consider unessential. They resisted with all their might the injunction to bow at the name of Jesus ; yet they were ready to join in the severest treatment of those, who could not conscientiously worship him, as the Supreme Deity. They refused, at the hazard of life, to kneel at the reception of the Lord's Supper ; yet, for a season, they would elect no man even to a civil office, nor allow him the common rights of a freeman, who did not partake of this ordinance in their own way. Their preachers would submit to any temporal inconvenience, rather than wear the surplice and other habiliments prescribed by episcopal authority ; yet they would pertinaciously withhold their fellowship, if not charity from those, who could not believe the doctrines of the established church. Though they had so recently smarted under the dire effects of ecclesiastical usurpations ; yet, after flying for their lives, and their equally valued liberties, to these distant shores, they proved equally intolerant of deviations from their own standard. Their language to those, who reproached them with inconsistency, virtually was, we give you liberty to think right, but not to think wrong, reserving to themselves the exclusive privilege of deciding in all cases of doubt.

The ground of this infatuation, the source of the greatest difficulties and perplexities, which have existed among Protestants, a most grievous and inconsistent infringement of the right of private judgment, and what

may be emphatically denominated *crux Reformationis* is the imposition of unscriptural creeds, not unaptly termed "the plague of wise men, and the idol of fools."

The principal arguments for this usurpation of the rights of conscience are, to establish uniformity in religion, and to promote soundness of faith. But are these objects really secured by the means employed?

What is the fact in respect of the Romish Church, which has surely been most successful in effecting uniformity? Wherever their members have been allowed to think for themselves, or at least to express their sentiments, we find as great diversities of opinion, as among Protestants. In a recent biography of Fenelon and Bossuet by a priest* of their own communion, we may remark, what discordances of sentiment divided the minds, exercised the ingenuity, and alienated the affections of these great men, the brightest luminaries of their church. What heart of sensibility, but must be touched at the imperious and dictatorial manner, in which the Bishop of Meaux assaulted his rival, and required him to bow to the authority of the Church; and at the mild and condescending tone, in which the amiable Archbishop of Cambray, evidently contrary to his convictions, submitted to the final judgment of the Pope and Cardinals at Rome!

At the commencement of the French revolution, when all restraints, but those of the mob, were removed from the minds of men, what great numbers of the Catholick clergy evinced, that the creed, which they had subscribed, had no influence in preserving them from every revolutionary excess! What a large proportion of their scholars, and even of their literary women, who knew christianity only in its corrupt forms, were converted into open and avowed unbelievers! One of the highest dignitaries of their church not only abjured his faith; but became a fit accomplice of regicides and atheists in all the projects of

* M. Bausset.

revolution, plunder, and carnage, which their fruitful imaginations invented, and so consistently executed.

With how much better success has the church of England effected uniformity by its articles of faith? In them we clearly discern additional proof of the slow progress of reformation. For they are taken with but little alteration or amendment from the creed of the church, which they profess to reform. This is not surprising, when we consider the period, at which they were constructed, and the motives of their framers for rendering them as little obnoxious, as possible, to those, whom they wished to convert to their own views. Bishop Milner, one of the most acute modern defenders of the Catholick faith, says of them,* “We continually hear the advocates of the establishment crying up the beauty and perfection of their liturgy; but they have not the candour to inform the publick, that it is all in a manner borrowed from the Catholick missal and ritual.” Is not the following reasoning of Fletcher,† another modern defender of Papacy, worthy of consideration? “Must not,” says he, “the principle be false, which declares, that it is the privilege, the unalienable privilege, as Dr. Pretyman calls it, of every christian to form his own religious opinions; or, if true, is not the intrusion of creeds, and the obligation of believing them, an encroachment upon the liberty of the individual? Doubtless if it be the privilege of each individual to judge for himself, and to believe, as he pleases, it is wrong to chain him down to any determined creed. Creeds should be burnt, as the dictates of spiritual tyranny; for creeds, according to the maxims of protestantism, being the opinions of men, who are liable to errors and mistakes, to propose them is but proposing what is probably false; and to oblige them to swear, that they believe them is obliging them to believe, what per-

* End of religious controversy, p. 182.

† Reflections on the spirit of religious controversy, p. 155

haps is impious or absurd. Is there not in all this a solemn mockery of the principles, upon which protestantism reposes ?”

It has long been proverbial, how essentially the members and the clergy of the church of England differ from one another, and from the articles, which they subscribe. No Calvinist doubts, that they are Calvinistical. But it is confined to Arminian subscribers of them alone to maintain, that they are shaped by the opposite standard of Arminius.

With many it is a powerful argument against the utility of these articles, as tests of faith, that such a distinguished writer and able divine, as the late Archdeacon Paley, who himself had subscribed them, could find no better defence, than to consider them, as “articles of peace.”

A celebrated Bishop of the Church not long since published an elaborate Arminian construction of the articles, under the proud title of “A refutation of Calvinism.” By numerous citations from the fathers he fully proved to his own satisfaction, that they also were of the same faith. But an answer soon followed from a Calvinistick divine of the same church, who was equally positive in establishing the opposite system of faith, and by equally numerous quotations from the fathers. This circumstance gave occasion to the pungent remark, that the Bishop of Lincoln must by this time have found the fathers, like elephants in ancient warfare, useful as auxiliaries, but very apt to turn upon their employers.

If we attend to the influence of creeds upon dissenters from the church of England, we shall find them as little conducive to uniformity, as in the other instances. When the dissenters were few, and had strong motives to harmony in opposing a common enemy, they were apparently united. But as their numbers and advantages for inquiry increased, their divisions of sentiment as necessarily mul-

tiplied. Their conflicting systems have, in every successive generation, given occasion to numberless contentions, and have established nothing more clearly, than the utter inefficacy of unscriptural creeds to settle points of faith, and the glaring inconsistency of protestants in employing them for this purpose.

Baxter, a name venerated by all classes of dissenters, remarks,* “We shall never have done with the papists, if we let go scripture sufficiency. And it is a double crime *in us* to do it, who dispute with them so vehemently for it. We harden and justify church tyranny and impositions, when we will do the like ourselves.”

It is to be deeply lamented, that the congregationalists of New England have not been uniformly more mindful of the well known parting advice,† given, in a spirit worthy

* Baxter's life &c. part iii, p. 65.

† The passage, though so often quoted, is worthy of repetition.

“Brethren, we are now quickly to part from one another, and whether I may ever live to see your face on earth any more, the God of heaven only knows; but whether the Lord hath appointed that or not, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, that you follow me no farther, than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

“If God reveal any thing to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it, as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded, I am very confident, that the Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of his holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go, at present, no further, than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw. Whatever part of his will our good God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die, than embrace it. And the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things.

“This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were burning and shining lights in their times; yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but, were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light, as that, which they first received. I beseech you, remember, it is an article of your church covenant, ‘That you be ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God.’ Remember that, and every other article of your sacred covenant. But I must, herewithal, exhort you to take heed, what you receive, as truth. Examine it, consider it, and compare it with other scriptures of truth, before you receive it; for it is not possible, that the christian world should come so lately out of such thick antichristian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.”

See Belknap's Biography, vol. ii. art. Robinson, pp. 172, 173.

the most truly liberal age, by the memorable John Robinson, to the first settlers of Plymouth. Though our fathers were impressed with horror at the claims and usages of the Romish Church ; yet they too nearly imitated one of its worst features in the restraints they imposed on private judgment ; and there has been too much Protestant Popery in every successive generation. I know, it is common to cloak whatever is offensive, and to give currency to an exclusive system of faith, under the plausible title of the doctrines of the Reformation. But suppose them to be such, as pretended ; why abjure the claims of the Romish Church on the ground of a right to free inquiry in matters of religion, and still in effect force your opinions on others, without granting them the same privilege ?

But there is an obvious fallacy in the very phrase, the doctrines of the Reformation, which ought not to pass unnoticed.

They are commonly identified with the sentiments of Calvin, "who yet," as Robinson observes, "saw not all things."

If by the doctrines of the Reformation be meant the religious opinions adopted by the first reformers, then they are unquestionably Lutheran, and are very distinct from those of Calvin.

But by the phrase in question it would be most proper to understand the principles, on which that glorious event took place, the grounds, on which it is vindicated. These may be obviously reduced to two ; the sufficiency of the scriptures, and the right of private judgment. On these principles Calvin himself acted in reforming upon the first reformers ; and the same undoubted right we in our turn claim and exert, when we refuse to call him master, and abjure all unauthorized attempts to impose his creed on ourselves or fellow christians. We affirm, that, in exer-

cising this privilege, we are countenanced by the real doctrines of the Reformation.

Some of the warmest advocates of the Genevan reformer disclaim, it is true, dominion over the faith of christians.

Still many, who call themselves Calvinists, in differing from the founder of their sect, take the liberty, which they refuse to others. Comparatively few now embrace some sentiments dear* to this reformer, such as the imputation of Adam's sin and of Christ's righteousness, and the doctrine of particular redemption, though one of the five discriminating points of his system. Nor is the doctrine of justification now commonly understood in the sense it bore, when it was boldly denominated, "Articulus stantis, vel cadentis ecclesiæ."

The General Association of Massachusetts, if so it may be called, while so large a portion of our Congregational clergy have no part in its concerns, instead of professing their faith in the Westminster confession, as a whole, warily adopt "the doctrines of christianity, as they are *generally* expressed in the Assembly's shorter catechism." With such a salvo, we may well inquire, what christian might not subscribe it?

The creed† of our neighbouring Theological Seminary, though it must be quinquennially subscribed by every one of its professors, contains nevertheless evasions, or omissions, or, to say the least, qualifications of some of Calvin's favourite opinions, which fill with alarm the breasts of the more scrupulous defenders of his system.

It may well qualify our respect for unscriptural creeds, to consider, that, like every work of man's device, they grow old, and decay; that they require to be every now

* See "A contrast between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism, by Ezra Stiles Ely," with the letters recommendatory.

† See the Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary in Andover.

and then amended; and that they thus occasion new devices to delineate the essential doctrines of religion more plainly, than the Bible has expressed them.

Much is said of the tendency of such formularies to promote soundness of faith. But the arguments in their support have but little weight with those, who firmly believe, that good men need no such precaution; and that bad men will never lack expedients nor inducements to evade it.

The argument employed against those, who disclaim the authority and the utility of confessions of faith, is, you have creeds of your own, why then do you oppose them in others? Our reply is, we object not to creeds in themselves considered; but to their unwarrantable imposition. In searching the scriptures, we acknowledge, we come to decisions, as dear to our hearts, as your's can be to you. But we presume not to enforce our conclusions, as terms of communion, much less of charity; and we think, our rights are not respected, when we experience not the same treatment in return. We object to your confessions of faith, not as founded on the scriptures, nor as containing their true sense; but as giving your construction of their sacred contents, which, we maintain, you have no authority to impose upon us. This abuse we contend, in whomsoever found, or by whatever means supported, or under whatever cloak concealed, is a direct infringement of a fundamental principle of the Reformation. It is Protestant Popery.

In the present state of religious opinion, of theological discussion, and of advantages for investigation, in our vicinity, though we perceive room for amendment, we hail the dawn of a brighter day, than has ever yet beamed upon our churches. With the gradual progress of literature and science in general, biblical criticism, with us a comparatively new study, is making continually increasing advances. Our Alma Mater and the neighbouring Theo-

logical Seminary seem to be vying with each other in providing the means of knowledge and of virtue. God grant, that they may faithfully improve them; and that their warmest strife may ever be to "provoke one another to love and to good works." In the theological discussion, now pending, we welcome a spirit almost unexampled in the annals of religious controversy; and we delight to infer, that it augurs the happiest results to the cause of "peace, of truth, and of righteousness." From the freedom, with which the neighbouring school of the prophets have asserted their right of private judgment, in examining the dogmas of the founder of their sect, and from the obloquy, which they have in this way incurred from many brethren, of the same denomination, we trust, that they will cherish a generous sympathy with a class of christians, who, in their maintenance of the same right, are "every where spoken against;" and we are persuaded, that, from the improvements they have already made on ancient systems of faith, they cordially unite with us in the sentiment of the eminent teacher* of our puritan fathers, "that the Lord has more truth YET to break forth out of his holy word."

We rejoice, that, notwithstanding what has now been frankly suggested respecting the faith of the Romish Church, we can retain undiminished affection for its regular and consistent professors and advocates; and that of this denomination there are, and have been instances of those, in whose friendship we have felt ever increasing delight, whose talents we profoundly respect, and whose virtue, fidelity, zeal, and other accomplishments we can unhesitatingly recommend to the imitation of every preacher, who would "covet earnestly the best gifts."

Instead of deprecating variety of opinions in religion, as unpropitious to truth, we exult in the advantages it has produced in every age of the christian church, and which

* Rev. John Robinson.

it promises still to promote. It has already been the principal means, under Providence, of preserving the sacred canon so free from mutilation and corruption; and we trust in God, that it will continue instrumental of constantly increasing advantages for ascertaining its correct text and just interpretation.

We congratulate you, young gentlemen, on being members of a University, which furnishes such opportunities and motives for the cultivation of your noblest powers.

We particularly felicitate you, who are meditating the clerical office, and you, who are actually engaged in its studies, on the privileges and advantages, which you here enjoy. "Brethren, ye have been called to liberty; only use not your liberty, as a cloak of maliciousness; but as the servants of God, though free" from the usurpations of men.

In our passage through life, respected hearers, whatever provocations may excite us to contend earnestly for our faith, or our christian privileges, let the bad passions be suppressed, and heavenborn charity be called into lively exercise by the reflection of an ancient and highly venerated divine* in our parent country, "While we wrangle here in the dark, we are dying and passing to the world, that will decide all our controversies; and the safest passage thither is by peaceable holiness."

* Baxter's life &c. part iii. p. 89.



